DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 654 HE 031 183

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TITLE	Faculty Workload Studies: Perspectives, Needs, and Future Directions. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, Washington, DC.; George Washington Univ., Washington, DC. Graduate School of Education and Human Development.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-HE-98-1
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	4p.; For the full report, see HE 031 184.
CONTRACT	RR93002008
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-183; phone: 800-773-3742; fax: 202-452-1844; e-mail: eriche@eric-he.edu
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Faculty; Cost Effectiveness; Educational Policy; *Faculty Workload; Higher Education; *Productivity; School Community Relationship; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest reviews the literature and discusses issues concerning college faculty workload. Trends in the United States which have created interest in faculty workload issues are identified including faltering state economies in the late 1980s and rising costs of higher education especially of personnel. Criticism of higher education by the business community and many legislators is also noted as contributing to interest in increasing faculty productivity. Reviews of studies on faculty workload suggest that faculty work long hours especially on teaching and teaching-related activities though time spent in the classroom is relatively small. A lack of studies examining productivity in faculty teaching and service is noted. Barriers which hamper finding solutions to the productivity problem are noted such as beliefs that teaching equates with lecturing and that faculty are responsible for all higher education's problems. The report urges a renewed focus on students' learning and alignment of institutional mission, the faculty reward structure, and public expectations. (DB)

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Faculty Workload Studies

Perspectives, Needs, and Future Directions

Katrina A. Meyer

As states continue to be pressured to provide increased services with constrained resources, it should be helpful to those in higher education--and in state legislatures and agencies--to understand the context within which the interest in faculty workload developed and perhaps may be resolved.

What Conditions in the States Create Interest in Faculty Workload?

Several trends are impacting states. Many states expect the "baby boom echo" to hit higher education; at the same time, more working adults need increased training and retraining.

The late 1980s saw faltering state and regional economies and growing unemployment. States were asked to fund growing prison populations, K-12 enrollments, and individuals needing social assistance. Rising taxes and stagnant wages created an environment of growing public distrust of government, and some taxpayers revolted.

Concurrently, the costs of higher education rose as growth in the HEPI exceeded growth in the CPI. Rising costs are caused by several factors, including increases in fringe benefits, new technology, more staff, and certain internal processes (Massy and Zemsky 1992). To cover rising costs, parents and students were asked to pay higher tuition.

Because the personnel budget often constitutes 80 to 90 percent of an institution's budget, state legislatures became increasingly interested in ways to increase the productivity of personnel. Studies of faculty workload were the result.

What Role Do Opinions Play in the Push for Greater Faculty Productivity?

The business community has been a major critic of the quality and productivity of modern universities. Many legislators view higher education as unproductive and unaccountable. And the public is caught in a bind: Postsecondary education is increasingly important for access to better jobs at the same time increases in tuition are putting college out of reach. Both sets of concerns increase the pressure to find ways to improve productivity in higher education.

What Do Studies of Faculty Workload or Productivity Tell Us?

Over 15 states, several systems, and three national studies have collected data on faculty workload. (These studies have definitional problems and provide different answers, depending on the focus of the study.) While the majority of studies indicate that faculty work long hours--over 40 to 50 hours per week--the time spent in the classroom is usually much less. Time spent on teaching or teaching-related activities is larger, depending on the number of activities included in the definition. Percent of time spent on an activity provides another view of faculty's effort, and teaching usually exceeds all other activities. The few instances of longitudinal data or data from large-scale surveys indicate that time spent teaching has declined.

Studies of faculty productivity traditionally have looked at productivity in research, but few efforts have looked at (or defined) productivity in teaching and service. Many of these studies suffer from inconsistent or nonexistent definitions and a lack of trust in the measures that do exist.

What Beliefs Are Barriers to Finding Solutions to the Productivity Problem ?

The focus on faculty workload is useful. It has not yet resulted in any gains in productivity, which may be because several beliefs keep us tied to increasingly questionable assumptions--that teaching equates with lecturing and that the classroom is the only place where learning occurs, for example. We also equate quality with inputs (e.g., full-time faculty, library holdings), and one input, time, is often used as an approximation of learning (although the belief that seat time and credit hours correlate to achievement is finding more critics).

We also tend to hold faculty responsible for all of higher education's problems and do not recognize growing competition from new educational providers. Those in higher education tend

to believe that its current problems are not serious and that no major changes are needed. And this situation is compounded by a perceived lack of leadership. But finger pointing, excuses, and denials will not help higher education find an appropriate course into an uncertain future.

What Solutions Will Help Higher Education Successfully Engage the Future?

If continuing to focus on faculty workload does not appear to solve the productivity problem, then what might be more helpful? The first step is to let go, to become open to the unknown (Guskin 1996), for we can't advance as long as we're holding tight to what no longer works (p. 28). While the end may not be known, it will likely require a renewed focus on students' learning or encompass a shift from the old teaching paradigm to a new learning paradigm. Placing students and their learning needs ahead of faculty preferences will have a profound impact on everything we now do (Plater 1995, p. 24), which would drive changes in faculty work, institutional structures, and academic policies. Faculty will likely need to not simply work harder at teaching but work smarter (Edgerton 1993, p. 6).

The focus on students' learning will require defining our outputs--skills and knowledge, competencies and level of proficiency expected--for courses and the baccalaureate degree. At the same time, new technologies will allow learning to occur at the time, place, and pace preferred by students rather than the institution. Technology can help improve productivity as well as make education available on every desktop.

To support these changes, institutions must adjust their missions to align more closely with public expectations, and the reward structure for faculty must be realigned to support teaching and a revised role for research.

The future is filled with dichotomies: increase quality and quantity of services *and* cut costs, standardize services *and* individualize programs, centralize *and* decentralize. But contradictions can create order by stirring things up until, finally, things become so jumbled that we reorganize work at a new level of efficiency (Wheatley 1992, p. 166).

Finding our way successfully to the future will require the minds, hearts, and emotions of all institutional members. Assumptions must be rethought, processes revised, behaviors relearned. We need to encourage creativity, restructuring, and experimentation if we are to discover what will work. And the entire community--as well as new leaders and fresh ideas--must be involved. At the same time, we will need to retain old values, such as service to others (Rice 1996).

Faculty must use their smarts to help devise the higher education institution of the future. Faculty will likely need to change their work to address students' learning, institutional priorities, and society's needs. But we will need all of their smarts to address the states' need for increased access, institutions' rising costs, and productivity.

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This ERIC digest is based on a full-length report in the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report series

26-1-

Faculty Workload Studies: Perspectives, Needs, and Future Directions by Katrina A. Meyer.

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This report was prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education in cooperation with the Association for the Study of Higher Education and published by the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at the George Washington University. Each report is a definitive review of the literature and institutional practice on a single critical issue. Many administrators subscribe to the series and circulate reports to staff and faculty committees with responsibility in a report's topic area.

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This publication was partially prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RR-93-002008. The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the department.

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